FEBRUARY MEETING, PROGRESSIVE GARDEN CLUB

A radio discussion by members of the Progressive Garden Club, W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, presiding, delivered through WRC and 39 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Tuesday, February 24.

ANNOUNCER:

At this time, ladies and gentlemen, the Progressive Garden Club is holding its regular monthly meeting here in Washington. At the January meeting, the members of the club held an informal discussion relative to plans for beautifying their home surroundings, and today they are continuing that discussion. Just a moment, please, and we will connect you with their meeting room.

(5 seconds elapse before beginning room noises followed by everybody talking at once. Continue for a total of 15 seconds during which special greetings and remarks go on the microphone).

MR. MILSTEAD:

Hello, John! How are you today; planted any garden yet?

MR. TEUTON:

Why bless my soul, look who's here. Say, I never expected to see you at one of these garden meetings. And there's Norma Hughes and Grace Perry. How-do-you-do Norma, and how are you Grace, you're both looking mighty fine.

CHAIRMAN:

Glad to see you Dr. Fletcher -- yes, we are going to start our meeting right away.

(Raps for order).

My, how you folks do like to talk when you haven't seen each other for a month. Well, let's get the meeting started. Last time, you remember we sat around this big table and just talked about our home beautification plans. Suppose we sit around the table again today, the crowd is a little larger, but I think there is room for all.

(Noise of moving chairs and drawing up to table while chairman continues speaking).

Dr. Fletcher, if you will kindly take this chair, and Mr. Mulford, you might take the chair at the end of the table.

(Noise of seating around table continues for 5 or 6 seconds).

These meetings of the Progressive Garden Club are for the purpose of helping all of us to make our homes more beautiful and attractive.

A well-kept lawn and borders of shrubbery and beautiful flowers are important in making a home attractive. Today, we are going to discuss a few points relative to the making and care of lawns, and the kinds of fertilizers for use on our lawns and ornamental plantings. We have with us today, Dr. C.

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C. Fletcher of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils of the Department of Agriculture, also Mr. Mulford, who is an old stand-by at our meetings and needs no introduction to you. Now, the meeting is open for discussion, and I hope you will fire your lawn and fertilizer questions right at Mr. Mulford and Dr. Fletcher. Who has the first question?

MISS PERRY:

I've just built a new house, and I want a good lawn, but the soil is a heavy clay and doesn't look as though anything would grow on it. What can I do to improve it, and make a lawn, Mr. Mulford?

MR. MULFORD:

In answer to your question about the preparation of soil in order to get a good lawn, Miss Perry, first of all, it must be well drained. Usually, in building a new home, reasonable provision for drainage is made. Second, the soil must be rich. Often the top soil is not saved when preparations are made for the building of the home. All top soil should be saved from the area to be occupied by the house and all the area where any change of grade is to be made either by cutting or filling. When the sub-grade is completed, it should have a good coating of manure worked into the top few inches, and then be covered with rich top soil, preferably to a depth of 8 inches, if possible. If the top soil is lacking in fertility, this too should be improved. After the ground is graded it should settle for about a month and then a fine seed bed an inch and a half or two inches deep should be prepared on the surface and the seed sown. This seed bed should be especially well supplied with readily available plant food so that the germinating grasses will have plenty to feed upon.

MR. SYMONDS:

I'd like for Dr. Fletcher to tell us about the best fertilizers to use in making a new lawn.

DR. FLETCHER:

That depends on where you live and the kind of soil you are dealing with. Where plenty of well-rotted manure as compost has been used in preparing the soil, all that may be necessary is a complete mixed fertilizer high in phosphate such as a 4-12-4 mixture; that is, 4 per cent nitrogen, 12 per cent phosphoric acid, and 4 per cent potash, applied at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet. Bone meal may be used at the same time and rate to give more lasting results. Bone is slow but safe. Where well rotted manure is not available, dried stockyards' cattle manure and pulverized sheep manure may be used as substitutes. On sandy soils, it may be better to use a fertilizer mixture higher in potash, for example, 5 per cent nitrogen, 8 per cent phosphoric acid, and 7 per cent potash.

J. H. BEATTIE:

When and how would you apply the fertilizer to a new lawn, Dr. Fletcher?

DR. FLETCHER:

The manures and fertilizers should be thoroughly mixed with the top few inches of surface soil. The manure or compost should be in a well decomposed condition so it will readily mix with the soil, The commercial fertilizer should also be spread uniformly and carefully raked or harrowed to insure uniform distribution.

MR. MILSTEAD:

I'd like to ask Mr. Mulford if there is any danger in the use of street sweepings for mixing with the soil in making a lawn?

MR. MULFORD:

With the advent of the automobile, street sweepings became dangerous to use, because of the oil drippings they usually contained. Manure from stables where borax or other materials are used to prevent fly larvae from working in the droppings, is also injurious, and manure from stables where sawdust or shavings are used for litter should only be used as a top dressing for rhododendrons, laurel, and other plants requiring an acid soil. A little lime and thorough rotting of the manure will correct this acidity.

MISS HUGHES:

As I was passing a store up-town the other day, I saw a window filled with bags of lime with a sign which read "Lime for use on lawns." What about using lime on lawns, Dr. Fletcher?

DR. FLETCHER:

It is all right to use lime during the preparation of the soil for making a lawn, that is, on many soils that are a trifle deficient in lime content, but lime is rarely used after the lawn is established. Much will depend on how acid the soil was in the beginning and the type of grass to be used. Some grasses will be more successful in acid soils than others. Where bluegrass is to be an important grass on your lawn lime is often desirable.

MISS PERRY:

Dr. Fletcher, is bone meal a good fertilizer for top-dressing a lawn, or should it only be used when you are preparing the soil?

DR. FLETCHER:

Bone meal carries phosphoric acid in a slowly available form and a small amount of nitrogen. Probably its best use is in preparing the soil for a lawn, but it is safe to use it at any time. If the lawn has been properly started, top dressings containing quickly available nitrogen are usually best, for example, nitrate of soda or sulphate of ammonia mixed with cottonseed meal.

J. H. BEATTIE:

In my travels, I have observed a number of cases where peat from peat beds was being used extensively as a lawn dressing, and I'd like to hear what Dr. Fletcher thinks of this practice.

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DR. FLETCHER:

Peat is a good top dressing, but is most effective when composted with manure before applying.

MR. SYMONDS:

I notice that cottonseed meal is recommended very highly as a fertilizer for lawns, especially for top dressing old lawns. What do you think of it, Mr. Mulford?

MR. MULFORD:

Yes, I regard cottonseed meal as an excellent top dressing for lawns fall or spring. An annual dressing would be from one to four pounds for 100 square feet. It may to advantage be mixed with an equal quantity of ground bone, the mixture being applied at the same rate. Cottonseed meal may be mixed with nitrate of soda or sulphate of ammonia, at the rate of 5 pounds of the cottonseed meal to one pound of the sulphate of ammonia or nitrate of soda. The mixture should be applied at the rate of 1 pound to 200 square feet and be repeated at intervals of a month or 6 weeks during the growing season.

MR. MILSTEAD:

I understand, Dr. Fletcher, that it is quite important to have plenty of humus in the top 3 or 4 inches of the lawn soil, and many of us cannot secure a supply of manure for this purpose.

DR. FLETCHER:

Composts will probably best meet this need of the lawn soil where manure is not available. They may be made from a number of waste organic products such as straw, leaves, or muck. Peat or humus mixed with manure makes one of the best composts. If the peat is mixed with part dried goat manure, stockyards cattle manure or sheep manure, is kept moist, and turned over several times, it will make a satisfactory compost. Bone meal or other fertilizer materials may be put in the composts. This is often a good place to use any wood ashes or soot which is on hand. The peat and dried manures are readily bought from dealers.

MISS HUGHES:

Last summer while visiting my cousin, she took me to their golf club, and they had the most wonderful greens. I asked the man in charge if it was Kentucky bluegrass, but he said it was some kind of Bent grass -- can you tell us what kind of grass is best for lawns and greens -- Mr. Mulford?

MR. MULFORD:

Several of the Bent grasses are being used for the putting greens of golf courses in the northern part of the United States where they may be cut and watered every day and given a top dressing of compost every month, but on the fairways where less attention is given, other grasses are used. Private lawns are more nearly comparable to fairways, and in the northern part of the country, Kentucky bluegrass is most likely to give good results. Bluegrass is a little slow in getting hold of the soil and stooling out, so it is a good practice to mix an equal amount -- by weight -- of redtop seed with the bluegrass. Some

gardeners use a smaller proportion of the redtop seed. The redtop comes quickly, but usually runs out by the time the bluegrass becomes well established. The combination of bluegrass and redtop should be sown at the rate of one pound to each 400 square feet of lawn.

MR. TEUTON:

Excuse me, Mr. Mulford, but my home is in the South -- what kinds of lawn grasses would you recommend for my part of the country?

MR. MULFORD:

In the South, Bermuda grass takes the place of Kentucky bluegrass for lawns. Carpet grass is probably even better than Bermuda grass, especially in shady locations.

MISS PERRY:

But, Mr. Mulford, I live "out where the West begins," what should be my choice of lawn grass?

MR. MULFORD:

On the plains, Mesquite grass is probably the best, especially in the northern portions. The Mesquite grass and the Carpet grass are started by planting bits of rooted stems -- called stolons. Bermuda grass is often started in the same way, but seed is also available and is being more and more used in establishing lawns.

J. H. BEATTIE:

Would you advise a shade or nurse crop for young grass, Mr. Mulford?

MR. MULFORD:

The nearest a nurse crop I would recommend for Kentucky bluegrass sown in late summer is the Redtop. If the lawn is being started in the spring, white clover may be used to produce an even quicker result than the Redtop. I would use no other nurse crops. In the South, the white clover may be used as a winter lawn and the Bermuda grass, or the Carpet grass, may then be set in the spring. I would not recommend oats or rye being used as a nurse crop.

MR. MILSTEAD:

How about covering the lawn with sod, is that practicable under most conditions, Dr. Fletcher?

DR. FLETCHER:

Usually, a seeded lawn is better. It is hard to get good sod and it is expensive. Under some conditions, however, it may be advisable to use sod. It gives immediate results. It is often better to sod a steep bank rather than to use seed on soil that is so sloping that it may wash badly before the grass can become established.

MR. SYMONDS:

Mr. Mulford, do you advocate rolling the lawn, and if so, when should the work be done?

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MR. MULFORD:

New lawns should be rolled as soon as the grass is sown, unless the sowing of the seed has been so fortunately timed that it is followed immediately by a good rain. Old lawns should be rolled each spring as soon as the ground is sufficiently settled that it can be done without the tracks of the men or horses being evident after the rolling is done. It is useless to do it until after freezing weather is over, or most of the good of the rolling will be undone by the later freezing. An occasional rolling through the season is advisable when the ground is sufficiently moist for the rolling to be effective in smoothing the surface.

MR. TEUTON:

When should you begin cutting a new lawn and how often should the grass be cut?

MR. MULFORD:

Begin to cut the new lawn just as soon as the grass is high enough for the lawn mower to take hold of it. Begin cutting the old lawn as early in the spring as the grass starts growth, and cut the grass about once in 5 days or a week, or as often as a growth of one inch is made. The frequency of cutting will depend to a considerable degree on the weather, but cutting should never be left until the grass becomes ragged or tough.

MISS HUGHES:

Would you advise having a grass catcher on the lawn mower and removing the clippings?

MR. MULFORD:

If the lawn is kept cut at sufficiently frequent intervals, and the clippings are all allowed to remain, they will dry and gradually work their way to the ground among the grass to add humus to the top soil. At some seasons this will take more frequent cutting than at others. The lawn clippings will largely take the place of compost.

CHAIRMAN:

I would like to ask if anyone has had any experience with power lawn mowers.

J. H. BEATTIE:

Yes, I have. I have a large lawn, about 150 by 180 feet in size, and it requires a good half-day's work with a hand-mower to cut it. One of my neighbors also has a large lawn, so we went together and bought a small power mower. That was about 3 years ago, and our arrangement has worked out all right, in fact, it would pay either of us to own a power mower, but we have gotten along very nicely, and the investment is not so great for either of us. It really costs very little to operate a small power mower, and a large lawn can be gone over in an hour's time. We do not try to go near the trees or shrubbery, but trim up afterwards with the hand mower. It is surprising how easily a small power

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mower can be handled. We have found that it pays to have the lawn free from humps or depressions and perfectly clean as regards sticks, stones, bones, or anything that would interfere with the operation of the mower. We avoid cutting the grass when it is wet or when the ground is soft. We keep the mower sharp and always store it in a dry place. A pint of gasoline and a gill of oil in a power lawn mower will change the drudgery of cutting the grass into something akin to joy.

MISS PERRY:

I've noticed that if you want a good lawn, you must water it. What is the best method of watering lawns, Mr. Mulford?

MR. MULFORD:

Follow nature, give the lawn a good watering, then wait a few days before applying any more water. Do not sprinkle continuously, and do not overwater. The type of soil also makes a difference in the frequency of watering. A sandy soil may require watering as often as every other day, and the water may be applied more rapidly than on a clay soil. A mist over several hours is best for clay soils.

CHAIRMAN:

Now folks, we have had quite a discussion on lawns, but we would like Dr. Fletcher to give us a little information on fertilizer for shade trees and shrubs. Do they need fertilizers?

DR. FLETCHER:

Trees, of course, need moisture, sunshine and food, but they are able to forage for their food in a large area of soil. Mulching with manure or compost often will be all that is needed. When fertilizer is used, nitrogen often gives the greatest response. I once bought a farm on sandy soil which had two very fine cherry trees in a field near the house. I was surprised at the exceptional vigor of these trees, but when I moved in, I soon found the reason. The former owner had a large number of chickens, and they had roosted in the trees, and the poultry droppings had benefitted the trees in an outstanding way. Fertilizers applied to the lawn or garden in the vicinity of trees will help the trees. You may also have a special interest in certain trees which will justify fertilizing them more than the returns would ordinarily warrant. For example, I have 3 pet goats which are of very little value, yet I am feeding them $32 a ton hay.

MR. MILSTEAD:

Suppose you have a tree growing in a small space, would it require any special treatment, Dr. Fletcher?

DR. FLETCHER:

Certainly. If it has only a small area of soil, it should be given extra food and water. It is much like a plant in a pot and is limited in its chance to forage for itself and must be helped.

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